Ella Myers. *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World.* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013). 232 pp. $26.05 Softcover.

It is easy to be discouraged when casting an eye over the contemporary American political scene. A dysfunctional political system seems either complicit in, or powerless to address, rising levels of economic inequality. Attempts to articulate a shared collective identity, to emphasize the ties that bind democratic citizens to each other, founder in the face of neoliberal celebrations of market mentality and individualistic morality, which take issue with the very idea of collective responsibility toward the less fortunate. Widespread citizen apathy creates a political vacuum that is filled by the most dogmatic, shrill, and polarized (and polarizing) political voices. Against this backdrop, and in response to the "ethical turn" in recent democratic theory, Ella Myers offers a pithy and persuasive case for a "worldly ethics," one based on "inciting citizens' collective care for worldly things."(11) *Worldly Ethics* is a deeply satisfying book, displaying the twin virtues of clarity and charity.

First, clarity: Myers' exposition of key terms is precise and thorough from start to finish, and she ably guides the reader from Michel Foucault's ethics of the self to Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of the Other to her own ethics of care for worldly things. The ethic of self-care proposed by such thinkers as Foucault and William Connolly, she argues, may offer individuals enhanced opportunities for self-creation and ethical cultivation, but it seems only tenuously connected to democratic politics. Such a focus on the self seems as likely to produce narcissistic solipsism as democratic engagement, and those celebrating it "exaggerate[e] the affinities between building a self and building a world."(50) An initially more promising option presents itself in the work of Levinas, for whom one's relationship with the Other places "the Other rather than the self at the center of concern."(61) Here again, though, and despite the further development of Levinas's insights by Simon Critchley and Judith Butler, Myers argues that "a real gap separates charitable ethics from associative democratic practice."(83)

"Care for the world," Myers's own contribution to the search for a democratic ethos, turns out to be more complex than it sounds, and understanding each of its constituent terms is crucial. Of course "care ethics" has already produced a considerable literature, which Myers builds on while differentiating her own approach from noted theorists like Joan Tronto. And the object of democratic care, for Myers – the "world" – requires her to navigates her way through Hannah Arendt's complex formulation of the social and political. This "world" is a complex entity. On the one hand, the world represents a shared home for human beings and other forms of life, which leads Myers to a broad endorsement of a democratically-infused capabilities approach a la Amartya Sen.

On the other hand, it serves as an intermediary between humans, constituted by exchange, debate, and collaboration, which leads her to call for an "expansion of the power of ordinary citizens to participate in their own government through multiple and accessible sites for the exchange of opinions and decision making."(125) Ultimately, Myers acknowledges, citizens do not encounter the world *in toto*, but rather through common projects around contested "worldly things": "the objects of associative democratic action."(93) An epilogue offers a few examples of promising movements seeking to engage democratic publics around issues of common concern, such as No More Deaths, Iraq Body Count, and Right to the City efforts.

Second, charity: *Worldly Ethics* is a model of interpretive charity. Myers is scrupulously fair to those whose views she criticizes; there are no low blows, no straw figures, no *reductios*. At all points in the book's exposition and critique, Myers goes out of her way to provide clear accounts of the arguments' main features, what they have to offer, and the ways in which they fall short of the sort of robust collective democratic ethos she is attempting to articulate. If all critical exchanges in political theory were conducted in the way that Myers engages her interlocutors, our debates would shed much less heat and much more light.

It is a virtue of this sort of book that it leaves the reader wanting more. *Worldly Ethics* seems to begin *in medias res*: as someone who works primarily in the history of political thought, I found myself wondering how Myers might account for how we have gotten into the mess we are in. The book's introductory chapter contains a few paragraphs about the history of democratic theory, and the complex relationship between the classical, republican, and liberal traditions and the idea of virtue, but is strangely silent on the theoretical and/or practical underpinnings of our contemporary situation. Surely the quandary in which so many advanced democracies find themselves did not arise overnight, and perhaps the framework of care for the world could elucidate the pathways that led us to our current situation.

Similarly, Myers's accounts of movements that exhibit care for the world, from Danish resistance to the Nazis during World War II (106) through Iraq Body Count or the Minnesota-based Our Water Commons in our own time (147-8, 150), are tantalizing but highly abbreviated. The goals of the more contemporary movements – to oppose the dehumanization of war or the privatization of such a fundamental human need as clean water – are fairly clear, but Myers's presentation of them allows for very little sense of how their members go about engaging with those on the other side of the issues (or with governmental or regulatory bodies at the local, state, or federal level), or what sorts of challenges they face in attempting to bring their concerns before broader publics.